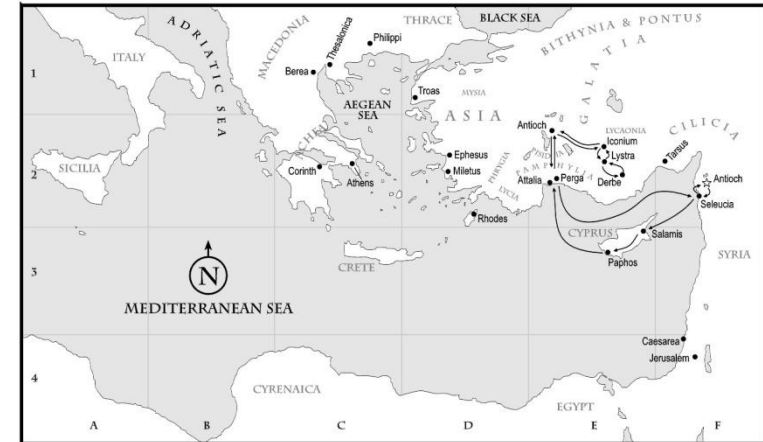


Paul's First Missionary Journey – (Study 1) “A greater number of people believed...”

Reading: Acts 11:19-22

- 1) In this passage what is the first thing that strikes you about those who started the church in Antioch? Why should this encourage us today?
- 2) Why are the events of verse 20 such a watershed moment in the early Church?
- 3) What are the three fundamental things, so essential to effective mission, that happen in verse 21?
- 4) What does verse 22 reveal about the reaction of the church back in Jerusalem to these amazing events?
- 5) From what we know about Barnabas already (see Acts 4:36 and 9:27), why do you think he was a good choice to assess the work at Antioch?
- 6) What would you say that these verses reveal about God's sovereignty in mission?

Paul's First Missionary Journey Introduction



*“And you will be my
witnesses...to the ends of the
earth”*

Home Fellowship Group Bible Study notes
Tuesday 11th/ Wednesday 12th January

At the beginning of Acts Jesus sets out to his disciples the Great Commission. They would continue the work he had begun. Theirs was the task to spread the good news of the gospel in Jerusalem and then gradually further until it reached the ends of the earth **Acts 1:8**.

Jesus was about to go back to the Father but had promised that he would return. Back in **Matthew 24:14** Jesus had linked this great mission with his glorious return.

The disciples were to wait until the promised Holy Spirit had been given; described in the events of Pentecost in Acts 2. The early chapters of this book written by Luke then record the establishing of the Christian Church in Jerusalem; a community of believers committed to the gospel and to fellowship with one another.

In fact within days the number of believers had exceeded 5000 (Acts 4:4) and as we read in Acts 2:47 there was an incredible momentum of the Spirit's work, for "*the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved*".

Not only had Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit on the church, but He had also warned of persecution and we soon see this coming to the fore. In chapter 4 Peter and John were put in prison and later only released under threat. In chapter 5 all the apostles are arrested, imprisoned, flogged and ordered not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus.

Finally this persecution reaches a new and disturbing height as Stephen becomes the first Christian martyr when he is stoned to death in chapter 7.

Acts 8:1 is a key verse in terms of what happens next. A great persecution of all believers breaks out and all except the apostles are forced to escape the city. Where do they go? They go throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. Far from quashing the effect of this new religious movement we read in 8:4 that "*those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went*".

Acts 1:8 is being worked out in practice; from Jerusalem into Judea; then through Samaria; and by the time we get to chapter 11 is pushing the

boundaries out into the then known world (**Acts 11:19**). But there was still more to do, for the gospel was not just for the Jew. We therefore go on to read of a pioneering work carried out by some of those who had been scattered from Jerusalem. These travelled as far as Antioch in Syria and began a new chapter of Christian mission that would fulfil that Great Commission **Acts 11:20**.

Alongside this great story is another drama unfolding, for Acts 8:1 includes another important piece of information. It is here that we are introduced to a Pharisee whose zeal to destroy those who followed the Way of Jesus would later be matched only by his zeal to make Christ known. Standing by and showing his approval to the stoning of Stephen in chapter 7, in chapter 9 he is remarkably saved, renamed Paul and commissioned to take the very gospel he had once so opposed to the very Gentiles he had once so despised.

Our Home Fellowship Group studies in this new series will focus on Paul's First Missionary Journey recorded for us in chapter 13:4 through to the end of chapter 14. It was a journey that would begin and end in Antioch; a city where we will begin our studies. Here we will examine the circumstances that led up to this great gospel work. We will look at the founding, establishing and developing of a church which had mission at its core; a true model for the missionary church in every age.

Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire. It was a highly cosmopolitan city with a large colony of Jews but also those from as far as Persia, India and even China. It was a magnificent city, a testimony to the supremacy of Greek civilisation. Over the years it became known as 'Antioch the Beautiful'. It had broad colonnaded thoroughfares, a wonderfully architected imperial palace, temples and the hippodrome where the novel Ben Hur places its chariot race.

But like any capital city of the day, alongside the splendour was the poverty with mile upon mile of overcrowded back streets. It was from here that ordinary men and women would have their lives transformed and would follow Christ. It would be here that a truly 'International' church would begin a missionary movement that would reverberate through history; a movement that would have eternal consequences.